

K.: Side two.

B.d.T.: And then I couldn't believe it. They came rolling down the hill at me, I'd never seen anything like it before, and I turned around and I was surrounded by planes. So I jumped into the pond.

K.: So, this guy that you really hate. You pick out this really mean picture and that's not manipulating at all. That's quite fair, right?

B.d.T.: I remember talking to one person. I just couldn't get out of his office and it was a very painful interview and I took all the pictures that I could and when I went to select the photograph I tried to find the photograph that he would be pleased with, that was the most direct, and not, sort of, tilted.

K.: And you couldn't find it?

B.d.T.: Yeah, I found one. Yeah, no, I did! I just remember thinking about that now, "What'll I do about this guy, you know?"

~~Or~~ If the photograph is a little manipulative, a little tilted or, you know, my own way of doing it and it

has my own feeling about it, I try to keep it extremely low-key. ~~You know. Because~~ I don't think people like to be told how they should feel about this matter. I think everybody's got their mind made up but what they don't have is any bank of imagery to, ~~kind of,~~ fill in the slots. So, ~~I figure that's~~ what I'm doing, <sup>2</sup> is ~~I'm~~ filling in those empty visual places in people's imaginations and I don't want to interject too <sup>many of</sup> ~~much~~ my own thoughts ~~about it~~ because people don't need that. ~~I think the result is that it's more effective. It goes through better if I can manage to withhold my comments.~~

K.: When I saw the exhibition at the National Gallery, ~~one I felt I was looking at two different styles of photography, thing struck me about the portraits and one about the nuclear weapons plants.~~ The portraits, in some ways, are quite romantic, and the images of the industry or ~~sectors of it or, I don't know, electromagnetic pulses or whatever, are~~ <sup>more neutral, topographic in photo lingo.</sup> ~~in photographic lingo, topographical.~~ But in the interview with Gail Fisher-Taylor you talked about wanting to produce beautiful images. And for me, romantic is not necessarily beautiful, topographical is not necessarily beautiful either. First of all, do you think the portraits are romantic?

B.d.T.: ~~Let's see!~~ I think so, I think I know what you're saying. ~~I responded right away when you said that, I~~

go, "Yeah, okay." They're kind of old-fashioned, they're kind of classic, and there's a certain strong emotional sense around them that fits into everybody's way of looking at movie stars. I think they're like that.

K.: The lighting <sup>to</sup> is ~~too~~ very often <sup>romantic,</sup> ~~it's side-lighting~~  
~~from somewhere,~~

B.d.T.: Well the lighting, ~~that~~ I'm not really able to control,  
~~so much.~~

K.: You could use flash.

B.d.T.: No I don't. ~~I just don't.~~ I'm not that kind of a photographer. I'm not a flash photographer. I could but I consider that a violation of certain documentary principles, ~~you know.~~ I figure, try to catch it the way it is, ~~basically.~~ ~~I mean,~~ I know that's impossible but <sup>using</sup> ~~bringing~~ a flash ~~into it,~~ ~~it just,~~ ~~it~~ turns it into something totally different. The only time I'd use a flash--at least at this point--is if I had to, if it was night. Like, you know, Diane Arbus, right? She uses flash a lot and it's wonderful, it has a great effect. To me, I like catching it the way it falls out because that's just how I go after it.

But ~~romantic~~, topographical? Let's see! There's only so much ~~you~~<sup>I</sup> can do, ~~I think~~, with some of those big plans, ~~you know~~, ~~I mean~~, ~~you~~<sup>I</sup> can't really make them dance the way ~~you~~<sup>I</sup> would like to. ~~So~~ I never saw myself doing aerial photographs; ~~for example~~. That was ~~like~~ something that people did who worked for the army. But gradually I've gotten to like it and to see it as a photographic challenge like any other. How do you make something interesting but you can't control it so much. I mean, you have to make the pilot fly around again and even then you never see it the same way twice. So, it's more limited but I now consider aerial photography as something every bit as challenging as street photography. It's just on another scale.

~~But, see, I don't think topographical or even beautiful.~~ What I meant when I said that to Gail Fisher-Taylor was that ... I meant beautiful, the picture ~~should be beautiful in the way that most pictures are,~~ you know? Most images that last have a quality to them: permanence, a certain something inevitable about them, and something interesting about them and challenging, and it's just the right mix. Even terrible depressing pictures, you know, like some of Ingmar Bergman's movies, people were telling me, "How can you see those movies, they're so depressing?" And I would



say, "Well, they're depressing but they're so beautifully done. They're so well crafted that it's okay that what he's talking about is something negative because he's so good at it." And that's the kind of thing that I had in mind when I was referring to pictures, I was trying to make them beautiful, just trying to make them ... You know, some people, sort of, stay away from making something pretty, or making something, you know, like, they try very hard to keep it, I don't know, you know, no emotional quality at all. I don't feel that I'm trying to do that. There's a certain kind of image that I really love and I'm trying for that all the time.

K.: What kind?

B.d.T.: Well, let's see! The best way to answer that would be just to show you images that I like, you know. It's just a certain combination of elements in an image. I mean, we could go through Vogue magazine and there would be three pictures in there that I would say, "There, that's what I'm talking about, that, right there, and none of the other ones." It's just a certain combination. I haven't really thought it all out.

K.: When you talk about beauty, from what you just said, it seemed to me that you were talking, ~~almost~~ about the structure of the image.

B.d.T.: ~~Yeah.~~

K.: ~~Or the underlying structure of it--~~

B.d.T.: ~~Yeah.~~

K.: ~~That makes the content visible.~~

B.d.T.: Right! That's what I mean. ~~Yeah, uh-huh;~~ how it's built. I'm not talking about the beauty of the thing that's in it, the content, but the form. ~~I'm talking about the form of the image.~~

K.: Do you know Alan Gussow? He used to be a landscape painter who became, sort of, an art activist, who started the Shadow Project, and before that he did something called "Lifeyards," which were graveyards to the nuclear war but he wanted to make "Lifeyards" because we're still all alive. And one of the things he said was that unlike other wars with nuclear warfare you have to make the monuments to the people beforehand rather than afterwards because nobody's going to be here.

B.d.T.: Right. That's right. That's a good thought.

K.: Do you share that sympathy?

B.d.T.: ~~Of course. Yeah.~~ To me the best expression of <sup>why we are concerned</sup> ~~that~~ <sup>with nuclear</sup> warfare was in Jonathan Schell's work. He said that this thing was so serious and so fast and so total that it requires what he called, "Preemptive repentance." That we have to be sorry we've done this before we do it because if we wait until we do it there won't be anybody left to be sorry. And that touched me very deeply and I feel exactly that, that we have to do something right now. This is it, this is the only time we will ever have to do anything. And maybe this moment will last another five hundred years, but that doesn't change the nature of it, because the way it's primed to go off, it could go off any time. ~~And it's got to, somehow, improve, you know? It's like, we could arrange our affairs, really, there are several other ways we could do it.~~ Right now this is what we've got: this hair-trigger situation, and that calls for that preemptive repentance, preemptive monument building, preemptive doing something. ~~It's a weird thing.~~ It's the strangest thing I've ever seen because <sup>with</sup> everything else, you can wait a little while and let it seep in and then go about recording it but this is different.

K.: Yeah. No, it's true. You know, when you think of photographs taken in the thirties, or during the depression, or even the earthquake, the Mexican earthquake. People don't photograph it before it happens, or don't photograph what is building up towards something like that, but with, I guess, with nuclear war you have to. And there's also a build-up, which you don't have necessarily with an earthquake. I don't know how you would photograph a build-up to the earthquake.

B.d.T.: An earthquake build-up?

K.: Yeah.

B.d.T.: No, you'd have to get down in there among the teetons and the teutons under the earth, right?

~~Bd~~  
~~K.:~~

~~But I'm looking for an aphorism that I wrote about that. There it is. Call it, "The World War of No Abode."~~ It's a war that's being waged with oceanic quantities of money, energy, time, materials, lives, paperwork, phone calls, coffee breaks, and nuclear weapons, because none of the weapons are allowed to explode, the war takes on a curious internal quality. For all the world it looks and feels like one big



bluff but it's no joke. Readiness is all, and finer and finer weapons are the exciting reminders that, yes, this is indeed real. This is very real, this war that's going on in all corners and it's also not happening anywhere at all.

~~K.: That's wonderful.~~

~~B.d.T.: That's the war! That's it!~~ It's on, full-steam ahead. And I'm trying to photograph it but it's so funny because people don't relate to it as <sup>war,</sup> ~~that but~~ ~~once the weapons go off that's almost an afterthought,~~ ~~because~~ the massive long-term deep preparations in a period of great peace have gone on now for forty years, So that when you finally flip the switch it shouldn't be a surprise to anybody. ~~So, to me it's a~~ good subject and it's, sort of, blessedly unself-conscious, somehow. That's like people, you know. So, I think it should be more conscious, actually, but anyway, for me, it's the right combination of lack of worry, you know, people don't mind you coming, in fact, they're quite open, up to a point about the whole thing: this and that.

K.: <sup>have</sup> ~~Do~~ people who are pro-nuclear weapons ~~build-up,~~ <sup>and</sup> ~~who~~ I would imagine some of the P.R. people at nuclear weap-

ons plants are, ~~have they~~ seen your photographs and what do they think of them.

B.d.T.: No. I don't show them my photographs. They have no need to know about my photographs, as we say in the trade. Need to know is a very important principle. They don't ask for that and I don't show it to them.

K.: What do you tell them you're doing?

B.d.T.: I tell them the truth, "I'm interested in making photographic images of nuclear weapons technology." That's what I tell them. That's apparently not an abnormal request.

K.: And no one asks to see pictures?

B.d.T.: No. They don't. Pictures, schmictures! They don't care about whether the composition is this or that. What they usually say right off the bat, <sup>is,</sup> ~~they say,~~ "We've got lots of photographs we'd be happy to give you." And I say, "Well, actually, I want to do them all myself." So, they say, "Well, okay. Some things you can do but other things we can't allow to be photographed, but we'll give you a picture of it." But I tell them I'm not making a scrapbook of images taken

by a lot of different people. It's, ~~kind of~~, a photographic work and they, kind of, understand that. You see, but they're not even curious, you know. They have a job. Their job is to interface with people like me, and to give me what I need, and to do a good job at it. And that's what they do. They are doing their job when they're relating to me. And they don't know about photographic books and art or any of that stuff. They know about transferring information in a compact and efficient manner and doing it pleasantly.

K.: But would there be a lot of people on their doorstep like you?

B.d.T.: Practically, as far as I can see, nobody ever asks. I mean, I could be wrong about that but I distinctly get that impression, that there are so few people that come knocking on those doors that when somebody like me shows up they're glad to see me. I mean, not exactly, some people aren't so glad to see me. I'm, kind of, a ... I represent a, you know, they really might not think it's such a good idea. But I get the impression that there aren't, isn't anybody doing this.

K.: Is an ambiguous reading of your photographs important? Like, if it can be read two ways?

B.d.T.: I think so. Yeah. I think it is important.

K.: Why?

B.d.T.: Because I think the issue goes two ways. And for the pictures to be good pictures of the issue, they should also go two ways.

K.: Okay. Since you've done radio programs for C.B.C. Ideas, and you've had an exhibition at the National Gallery, and you have plans for a book, and there's a videotape. You're starting to do videotapes, is that right?

B.d.T.: Yeah. Uh-huh.

K.: All around the nuclear weapons technology and industry and so on. For you, is it just using different media, when appropriate, to say the same thing, or are you saying different things with the different media?

B.d.T.: I think it all grows out of essentially the same thing. It just sits there like an apple on the table, this thing, this arms race. But there's no one way to do it. I find it an incredibly inspiring subject worthy of all the artistic energy that anybody can put

into it. Look at what it does to people! That's worthy of exploration and expression.

And in my own case, it started out photographically. It just flowed right into tape recordings because what the people were saying was real interesting. Tape recordings flowed right into a radio program. That was a natural. And all my life I've wanted to be a cameraman but I could never afford sixteen-millimetre film. And just a few circumstances kind of fell into place, and when I started doing video it was the result of, it was like a lifelong wish come true. So, that wasn't so far afield either. And, I think that I get very different, kind of things with the different media.

K.: Do you switch media for yourself in that sense, like, to keep your own interest heightened because...

B.d.T.: No. I don't have any problem keeping my interest heightened. My interest is, sort of, pegged at a high point and it just stays there and I've never been, had a problem with that. I don't know exactly how to explain it. It's just a, kind of, a natural evolution, I think, that a lot of people go through. They try out one thing and then it leads to something else.



You know. It's, sort of, like that, it's like you're doing oil paintings and then you start doing sculpture. And it's not something you can explain so easily.

K.: Are you obsessed by this issue?

B.d.T.: Well, my brother says I am. He said that five years ago, my brother, Peter. I was visiting with him and I showed him my first batch of photographs and he looked at them rather quickly and then he eyed me and then he said, "You know, you're obsessed with this issue." I think obsessed is something that somebody else says about you, that an obsessed person would never say that he was obsessed. That's, like, a third person comment on a person so maybe you ought to tell me whether I'm obsessed.

K.: Probably.

B.d.T.: It feels like the whole world is inside of this issue. I can't think of anything that I know or love that isn't applicable, that is not actually contained within this issue. So for me it's a very expansive issue, but it's also extremely narrow. It's, like, who gets to go over that fence, you know? Not very

many people. So, there's a lot of fun in that but to me the underlying concern, it just encircles the entire planet. And so, to me if something is--I guess it's an obsession, if you could clock it and chart it out and money and time and this and that, but it doesn't feel like that. I feel good about it and I feel that it doesn't cut me off from other concerns. It seems to feel like it opens me up. I don't feel like I'm backing myself into some kind of corner, artistically or any other way.

K.: No. I know, I mean I don't mean obsession like that.

B.d.T.: Oh, I see. Well, to me, obsession has a, kind of, negative association.

K.: No, I don't. I would assume that in order to gain--to be persistent about gaining access to certain places and flying here and there and everywhere within certain time frames, you'd have to be obsessive.

B.d.T.: In my country they call that "passion."

K.: <sup>Would you</sup> ~~Do you want to~~ talk <sup>abit</sup> about the picture of the electromagnetic pulse?

B.d.T.: Why should I talk about that picture?

K.: Because I like it.

B.d.T.: Why do you like it?

K.: Because it's a good example of something that you said before, that ~~where~~ you wanted your pictures to elicit a response from people, "What is this!" ~~You know,~~ ~~Take~~ their breath away. ~~"What is it?"~~

~~B.d.T.: Yeah. Or, "What the hell is this?"~~

~~K.:~~ Or, "What the hell is it." ~~Yeah.~~ And certainly that's the way that one affects me.

KT : *What about the picture of the electromagnetic pulse, <sup>simulator.</sup> What's the story behind that one?*

*space 4"*  
B.d.T.: I'll tell you the story of that picture. I was driving through the Whiteman Air Force base, ~~I think that's the name of it.~~ It's the one in Albuquerque. ~~We were going to somewhere else on the base and we were driving by,~~ and this thing kind of goes passing by the car and I said to myself, "What the hell is that?" ~~And then I said, "I hope it's pertinent, I'm just keeping my fingers crossed,~~ I hope it's got something to do with nuclear technology." So I asked the guy, <sup>and</sup> ~~"What is that anyway?"~~ He said, "Oh it's an electromagnetic pulse dipole simulator, and that means that it puts out a phony electromagnetic pulse over an

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pg. 11

airplane to test the instrumentation, and that pulse matches the pulse that comes off a bomb exploding in air. <sup>They were testing to see if the instrumentation would hold up.</sup> ~~So if that airplane that's on the trestle under pulse under attack.~~ it were, like, on its way to Russia bearing nuclear weapons and a bomb exploded, <sup>they wanted to find a way to see if</sup> would the instrumentation in the plane hold up? So it was directly pertinent, it couldn't've been more pertinent. And so I was very happy because I was saying <sup>to myself that</sup> ~~all along~~, "It <sup>would</sup> make a great image. ~~It's just a strange looking thing that it would be perfect.~~" And so I was hoping that it wasn't for solar energy or something, <sup>like that.</sup> And it ended up being quite appropriate.

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①

Okay these are from Aphorisme Atomici, it's a town in -- This is called, "The Man in the Uranium Helmet". "His head is heavy and his brains beneath the load are constantly bombarded with gamma rays. The expression on his face is unique. He has at hand the capacity for planet extermination and he has made a vow to use it. He has a strong sense of duty, a sense of heroism, and a sense of restraint. He is very patient, somewhat worried, slightly nervous, and firm. He is young. He is developing a cataract in one eye. He has not ever used his weapons in the field nor met the enemy in any test of will, nor has he tested his own will in this matter. He's the man in the uranium helmet and we haven't heard the last from him yet."



This next one is called, "The Horror and the Sobbing." "So far so good," they say, in a tone of voice designed to back off altogether when the atoms hit the fan. The second half of that statement is this, "Oh well!"

K.: They're wonderful.

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B.d.T.: Well, <sup>another</sup> here's ~~one~~. I don't know if you'd print this ~~one~~. I like it though. "Hail to the Chief." "It was Hitler's audacity and his capacity for evil that lit our Bunsen burners and got us cracking on the bombs of doom. He was our inspiration, and his presence is still felt in between the lines in every person's face who walks in the shadow of the bomb. Hitler made yet another contribution: the V-2 rocket, parent of the ICBM. What appeared then as the very essence of evil, Hitler with an atomic bomb and the rocket to drop it on cities, turned in a twinkling, during which two cities were incinerated, into the world's greatest symbol of peace, strength, freedom. The rationale behind this liberated nuclear stance is very different from what Hitler's would've been. But deep beneath the posture and its rationale is that old-time atomic delight, the delight that lit the skies over Nagasaki and Hiroshima and that lit the ovens inside Dachau too."



END <sup>TP</sup> L It's true.

K.: ~~Yeah.~~

~~B.d.I.: And I got one--I got two funny ones--three funny ones,~~  
~~can I read <sup>a couple of</sup> three funny ones?~~

K.: ~~Yeah. Sure~~

② B.d.I.: This is called, "Modern Art." "What is it that makes people have pointed heads with eyeballs extended, seeing from past and future at one time, has them walk in multiple freeze frame, no longer with any Newtonian point of reference. What dashed romanticism, embraced nihilism, fractured continuity, and laughed in the face of the divine. What defined everything before and knew, in terms of itself, not in terms of Nature or the social framework."

③ ~~Oh, here's a funny one. This is called, "Atomic Piz-~~  
~~za.~~ "For crust: the Earth. For tomatoes and greens: people and trees. Freeways are the strips of bacon. Churches are the cheeses. Pickles and onions: Parliaments and Congresses. Pin the crust to the place with multiple thermonuclear devices, and sprinkle liberally with defective microchips. Season with activists, and

pepper it with armaments. To cook: stand back, cross your fingers, close your eyes, lift your head, and pray!"

Oh! I've got to read this one. ~~You've got me going now. This is a good one now.~~ It's called, "Behold the Elephant."

~~K.: Okay, wait! I've got to put a new tape in.~~